

Executive Officer's Statement
California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board

March 17, 2005

California Observes the 25th Anniversary of National Crime Victims' Rights Week

The 25th annual National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 10-16, offers an opportunity for state, local and community organizations to join together to honor crime victims and survivors. This year's theme is "Justice Isn't Served Until Crime Victims Are."

The Board will recognize this occasion in several ways. In conjunction with the State Controller's Office, the Board arranged for a message about National Crime Victims' Rights Week to be printed on each state employee's February pay warrant, along with the toll-free number for the Victim Compensation Program. The Board will also distribute materials, including ribbons, posters, and a comprehensive media kit, to each county Victim Witness Assistance Center to help them draw attention to crime victim compensation as part of their local events. On April 12, Board staff will join crime victims and advocates from across the state in the 16th annual Victims' March on the Capitol. Held on the west steps of the Capitol, the event includes information booths and displays, as well as a program at 11:30 a.m.

Tribute to Crime Victims' Rights to be held April 5

The Board is also collaborating with the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency, the California District Attorneys Association, the Institute for the Advancement of Criminal Justice, Governor's Office of Emergency Services, and the Health and Human Services Agency to honor Californians who have furthered the rights of crime victims over the last two and a half decades at a reception and luncheon on Tuesday, April 5.

The invitation-only event will take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. Twenty-five years ago, President Ronald W. Reagan declared the first National Crime Victims' Rights Week to focus attention on crime victims and the professionals and volunteers who assist them. This year's tribute will recognize almost 200 crime victim organizations that have served victims for 25 years or more. The Honorable Lois Haight, now a Superior Court Judge in Contra Costa County, will be a featured speaker. Judge Haight served as chair of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime in 1982, and helped author the Task Force's important Final Report, published in December 1982. The report served as the blueprint for subsequent development of victims' rights and services in the United States.

Board Issues Final Report on its Judge's Pilot Program

The Board facilitated a four-year Judge's Pilot Program to streamline the implementation of restitution orders in Alameda, Sacramento, and San Diego counties. The program successfully demonstrated a number of strategies to better serve victims and to enhance the stability of the Restitution Fund. In a final report on the project to be submitted to the Legislature, the Board summarized the successful strategies employed in each county.

- Alameda County made key changes to its data collection system to include restitution-related information; established procedures to modify orders when offenders are incarcerated or on probation; and established weekly restitution courts to amend and enforce orders. By Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-2004, Alameda County recorded restitution orders to the Board in 63 percent of the cases in which the Board had paid an award, up from 26 percent in FY 1998-1999, the first year of the pilot program.

- Sacramento County's streamlined restitution processes increased the amount of restitution orders imposed from 39 percent of the amount of compensation awarded by the Board in FY 1998-1999 to 51 percent in FY 2003-2004.
- San Diego County was able to increase the amount of restitution orders imposed from 5 percent of the amount awarded by the Board in FY 1998-1999 to 43 percent in FY 2003-2004.

The program afforded an opportunity for the participating counties to review their entire restitution programs. In addition to enhancing the Restitution Fund, the new procedures also improved restitution services to crime victims. The Board has compiled the best practices and tools from the study and will distribute them to courts, probation offices, and district attorney's offices across the state.

Board Helps Sponsor Summit on Identity Theft Solutions

Identity theft can happen to anyone. A million Californians were victims of identity theft in 2004. On March 1, 2005, the Board participated in a groundbreaking summit to address this issue. "Locking Up the Evil Twin: A Summit on Identity Theft Solutions" was sponsored by the California District Attorneys Association, State and Consumer Services Agency, California Department of Consumer Affairs, and the Office of Privacy Protection.

Secretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency and Board Chair Fred Aguiar attended the conference, as did Board Member and San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael Ramos. The Board's Executive Officer Karen McGagin served on the Summit Advisory Committee to help plan the event.

More than 600 people attended the summit and many of them stopped by the Board's information table. Sacramento County District Attorney Jan Scully was the summit's keynote speaker. The event brought victims of identity theft together with experts from business, law enforcement, and consumer advocacy, to share information and develop better ways to fight this crime.

Steering Committee Begins Planning for California State Victim Assistance Academy

The Board's Chief Deputy Executive Officer Richard Anderson has been invited to serve as a member of the steering committee for the California State Victim Assistance Academy, and attended the first steering committee meeting on March 4. The Office of Emergency Services has received a three-year grant from the federal Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to develop and implement a state victim assistance academy.

The academy is a partnership between OES, the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Attorney General's Office, the Youth and Adult Corrections Agency, the Victim Witness Coordinating Council, the California Alliance Against Domestic Violence, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the McGeorge Law School Victims of Crime Resource Center and the Fresno State University Department of Criminology. Fresno State has served as a host site for the National Victim Assistance Academy since 1996.

The steering committee is currently conducting a statewide training needs assessment, designing curriculum, and developing student selection criteria over the course of the next year. The first academy is expected to take place in mid-2006.

To date, OVC has funded 19 state victim assistance academies.

Training Begins on the Board's New Policy and Resource Manual

In February, the Victim Compensation Program released a new *Policy and Resource Manual* for claims specialists and support staff. Sacramento staff members attended training on the new and revised policies in February and March. Training for contracted staff members in offices around the state will take place in Humboldt, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Riverside, and the Bay Area in late March and throughout the month of April. For the first time, the new manual has been made available to staff electronically on CD and via the Board's Intranet.

Board Staff Receives Training on Domestic Violence Issues

Victim Compensation Program staff members in Sacramento are scheduled to receive training from local domestic violence service provider, Women Escaping A Violent Environment (WEAVE), on March 15. The presentation will include an overview of domestic violence and tips for working with domestic violence victims over the phone.

Board Participates in Townhall Meeting to Assist Shasta County Fire Victims

In August 2004, an arson fire, the Bear Fire, destroyed 82 homes in Shasta County and burned 10,484 acres. On February 15, 2005, the Shasta County District Attorney's Office invited the Board to participate in a community briefing for victims of the fire. Meeting attendees received information about the criminal case, set for trial on March 22. Board staff members presented information about victim compensation and the Good Samaritan Program, detailing benefits that may be available to those ordered to evacuate during the fire.

Public Invited to Access Updated Precedent Decisions on the Board's Website

The three-member Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board has adopted 22 precedent-setting decisions since 1998. Recently the Board updated the index of precedent decisions on its website. The public can access the decisions by date, decision number, subject matter, or relevant statute. The Board can designate certain decisions as "precedent decisions" if they address a legal or factual issue of interest to the general public; resolve a conflict in the law; or provide an overview of existing law or policy. In 2004, for example, the Board issued precedent decisions relating to chiropractic care, in-home care, relocation expenses, and late filing of applications.

Board Staff Attends National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Annual Meeting

On March 3-5, Board staff participated in the National Child Trauma Stress Network's annual meeting, "Transforming Trauma Care for America's Children and Families," in Washington, D.C. The meeting addressed topics relevant to the Board's work, including how to address child trauma in rural America in schools, among refugees, and within the foster care system.